

Tafseer Surah al-Ma'un (الماعون)

Notes on Nouman Ali Khan's Concise Commentary of the Quran

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Introduction

- This surah is divided into two halves and they are both connected with each other
 - The first half is singular and the second half is plural
 - There is also a contrast:
 - In the first half, there is mention of one crime against Allah and two against mankind. In the second half, there is mention of two crimes against Allah and one against mankind
 - This implies that both are connected in some way. When we are grateful to Allah, we will also be just towards mankind and if we are ungrateful to Allah, then we will also be the same towards mankind
- This whole surah criticizes the different practices among the Quraysh
 - The opposites of such behavior results in becoming a slave of Allah
 - They Quraysh were the custodians of the Ka'ba and should have been the best worshippers, however, they were greedy and insincere towards Allah, therefore, Allah is highlighting such negative qualities among them
 - Why does the Quran contain historical information from the Prophet's (pbuh) time though it is supposed to be timeless?
 - Because it wants us to relive the original struggle of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) over and over again. Getting to know the life of the Prophet (pbuh) through the lens of the Quran is fundamental to guidance. It keeps that guidance timeless
- There is a debate about this surah whether it was revealed in the Meccan or Medinan period
 - However, it seems that it is from the Meccan period
- Some of the companions viewed this surah as a reference to Abu Lahab
 - He was the Prophet's (pbuh) uncle and an enemy of Islam
 - He was in charge of the finances of the Ka'ba and was hot tempered
 - He used to push away the orphans from donations
 - There are other opinions as well as to who this surah is about, however, the verses contain timeless lessons that can incorporate anyone who carries similar characteristics

Tafseer of the Verses

1. Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense?

- a. This is Allah's way of saying that He knows exactly who such people are

- b. Allah is describing people in this surah who not only deny Islam but are also taking proactive steps against it
- c. The word *takzeeb* (to deny) has a range:
 - i. Those who consider Islam as a lie
 - 1. Even if they do not say anything
 - ii. Those who vocally call Islam a lie
 - 1. In other words, they preach against Islam
 - iii. Those who make false claims against Islam
 - 1. These are the worst
- d. The Arabic word *deen* (recompense)
 - i. It could mean dealings between people
 - 1. This is why some said it refers to the ultimate justice that will take place on the Day of Judgement
 - ii. It could also mean Islam itself
 - iii. Some said it means justice in general
 - 1. The first two meanings are stronger than this

2. For that is the one who drives away the orphan

- a. The letter *fa* in this verse led some to believe that it refers to a separate group of people than those in the first verse
 - i. However, it is a progression from the previous verse. It is highlighting one of the qualities of those mentioned in the first verse. It is saying that because such people deny the ultimate justice on the Day of Judgement, they resort to such behavior
- b. It is not just physically pushing the orphans away but also includes when they are undermined in some way
 - i. Ex: putting an office or resources in a place where they do not have access
- c. The word *miskeen* (orphan) linguistically means when someone is stuck in a certain situation where he/she cannot help himself/herself
 - i. So linguistically it could refer to more than just orphans, such as, the physically impaired, prisoners, jobless, sick, debtor, etc.

3. And does not encourage the food of the poor

- a. Meaning such people do not even feel the need to encourage others to give
 - i. We are being told to encourage others to give to the poor and needy
- b. The Arabic word *ta'aam* (food)
 - i. It means nourishing food
 - ii. The words 'food of the poor' are used in the verse because it is their right. It is actually theirs and not ours
- c. The verse could also mean that due to corruption or other failures, they do not even talk about the fact that the poor are being deprived
 - i. We as a society need to identify such problems and take care of them
 - ii. They are just idly watching as injustice takes place
- d. This is the end of the first half of the surah

4. So woe to those who pray

- a. This is the beginning of the second half of the surah
- b. It could be referring to the Meccans who had invented their own form of prayer in front of the Ka'ba
 - i. However, it is deeper than that
- c. It means there will be a severe punishment for those who are heedless and insincere of their prayers [al-Tafseer al-Muyassar]

5. **[But] who are heedless of their prayer**

- a. The Arabic word *saahoon* (heedless)
 - i. It means forgetting something while your heart is not mindful of it
 - ii. In this context, it means that such people's attitude towards prayer is that of heedlessness, it is not a big deal to them
 - 1. This shows us that one of the fundamentals of taking our religion as truth is our attitude towards salah (prayer). Do we consider it a big deal or not when we miss it?
 - 2. This is in reference to their overall attitude towards prayer and not necessarily what happens **inside** of their prayer because the word عن (of) is used and not في (in), which would drastically change the meaning to include all those who do not have their hearts present while inside of their prayer, which affects many of us

6. **Those who make show [of their deeds]**

- a. The criticism continues that those among such people who do pray, they do not do so for Allah but just as a show to others. The person is expecting appreciation, admiration, praise, etc. in return as acknowledgement
 - i. Even though this surah is mainly speaking about the Quraysh during the Prophet's (pbuh) time, this happens even today when people do religious things just to get attention on social media or to get likes and comments

7. **And withhold [simple] assistance**

- a. The Arabic word *al-ma'un* (assistance)
 - i. It means small favors of assistance, such as, a pot, a gift, a morsel of food, a few dollars, etc.
 - ii. In this context, Allah is telling us that such people want to create a culture where no one helps anyone even if they are small things. They are creating an atmosphere of everyone looking out for themselves
 - 1. When this happens, then the people of such a society do not stand up for others' rights
- b. The implication here is that those who sincerely pray to Allah do not possess such qualities